

SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

Volume 3.6, November/December 1998

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

HOW TO TEACH BEGINNERS, NO. 27

By Dr. Haruko Kataoka

CLEMENTI, SONATINA, OPUS 36, NUMBER 3, *SPIRITOSO* (PART 1)

This is a very important piece for the study of playing *legato* 16th notes and chords.

Always practice the 16th-note sections (measures 2, 7, 15-17, 22-23, and similar sections in the second half of the piece) right hand alone. Since four 16th notes constitute one single beat it is good to practice in rhythms, holding the first note in a group of four and singing it out long and deep, followed by three small, light tones. Or we may play all four notes slowly and evenly at the same tempo taking care always with the first note of each group. Without following a program of a minimum number of repetitions of this sort of practice (for example, 10-20 times) every day, always playing good *legato* with good, natural fingers and a quiet tone, we will not be able to play this piece beautifully.

Next, how to practice the chords. In measures 5-6 there are groups of four eighth notes in thirds. Because this piece is in quadruple time, the first beat is *down*, a downbeat. Carefully play it *down* and *staccato*. Play the next three chords lightly. Although not chords, the following left-hand notes are executed in the same way. The quarter notes after the groups of four eighths are not *staccato*. Play them with the correct length.

Measures 8-9 should be performed in the same way.

There are many chords in measures 10-12. Play these in the rhythm of quadruple time, down and up, as in taking something with natural and soft fingers.

This section begins *piano*, and then *crescendo* to a *forte*. Play the first chords *piano* without moving either the palm or fingers. Produce a small tone delicately, using just a bit of the fingertips with a very small movement on the keys. The end of the section is *forte*, which is easy to play by making the body 100% relaxed. Having the hands and fingers 100% relaxed is natural. We exhale at the downbeat and inhale at the upbeat, just the same as the diaphragm breathing. We coordinate body balance, the movement of the fingers, and our breathing together at the center of our body, at the waist. By doing this, a beautiful and musical *forte* tone can result.

Do not forget to teach students how to practice the *crescendo* in the 16th notes in measure 2. Practice at the lesson, by having the student play the first four notes (*do, re, mi, fa*), right hand alone, with a very, very small tone many times. When the student can do that well, practice the next four notes (*sol, la, ti, do*) by playing the first two with the same very small tone and the last two with big tone. Ask the student to practice this way at home every day. A student who practices this way slowly every day will be able to play a beautiful *crescendo* in performance.

The first four measures in the left hand must be practiced carefully. When playing repetitious patterns such as this, the left-hand accompaniment takes charge of the tempo and rhythm which are the very foundation of the

piece. Therefore, do not just play the notes, all in the same way. The quality of the performance depends on whether or not the accompaniment is good.

Practice in rhythms, holding the first note in each group of four longer, and singing it deeper than the others, which are played lightly, evenly and more quickly.

Be careful about the *down* and *up* in the left hand in measures 7-8. The notes on the first and third beats are *down*, and the rest are *up*.

(To be continued)

DR. KATAOKA'S 1999 WORKSHOPS

JUNE 6-11 LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Grace Baugh Bennett, Director
8201 Old Westport Road Louisville, KY 40292
Phone: 502-852-0537
Fax: 502-852-0520
email: gbbenol@ulkyrm.louisville.edu

Faculty: Bruce Anderson
Cheryl Kraft
Linda Nakagawa
Gretchen Smith
Shelley Sparks (Theory)

JUNE 16-20 PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Joan Krzywicki, Director
1102 Cromwell Rd. Wyndmoor, PA 19038
Fax: 215-836-0968
email: krzywicki@sprynet.com

AUGUST 6, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 10-PIANO CONCERT

Linda Nakagawa, Director
242 River Acres Drive Sacramento, CA 95831
Phone/Fax: 916-422-2952
email: lgnak@quiknet.com

PLAN AHEAD..SCHEDULE NOW!

SUZUKI CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION A PIANO BASIC CONTRIBUTION

BY CLEO BRIMHALL

The Suzuki Association of Utah piano students had the opportunity of performing in a state-wide memorial concert in honor of the 100th anniversary of Dr. Suzuki's birth. The concert was held in the Huntsman Center arena at the University of Utah. Performers included over 1700 students each wearing black and white and the beautiful gold Centennial Medallion on a red ribbon. There were 400 pianists, 750 violinists, 125 cellists, 75 violists, 5 string bassists, 60 harpists, 70 flutists, 20 guitarists, 65 voice students and 130 pre-twinkle students. The pre-twinkle students recited "*Beautiful Tone, Beautiful Heart*" and did a performance bow before receiving their official centennial medallions from their parents.

The pianists performed in 5-Piano Concerts at two separate Gala Lobby Fest locations prior to the Finale Memorial Concert. During the Memorial Concert each instrument was allowed eight minutes of music. In the center of the arena stage, five Kawai grand pianos were spotlighted. The pianists performed four of our graduation pieces: *Minuet 2*, Bach; *Sonatina Op. 36, no.3*, Clementi; *Gigue* from the *Partita in Bb*, Bach; and the *Rondo Alla Turca*, *Sonata K. 331*, Mozart.

At the end of the concert, there was a *Unison Section* for all 1700 instruments to perform together. We had 40 pianists lined up by the pianos. Each one played one of the unison pieces and then turned the piano over to the next student. The unison pieces were played in the key of D major which was accessible to all instruments. The songs chosen for unison were *Allegro* by Dr. Suzuki, *Go Tell Aunt Rhody*, *Lightly Row* and five *Twinkle Variations*. (Everyone joined in singing "*Twinkle.*")

The piano teachers and students would like to thank Dr. Kataoka for working so hard to teach us - especially the principle of beat. Because we have been studying carefully, this principle was taught by all teachers and the five pianos sounded as one. It was impressive to the audience and we felt good about giving the students such a positive experience. Also one of the fathers at the Lobby Fest made the comment, "*This could be a real mess if the children were not prepared so well!*" As it was, each student came away with a very happy and successful feeling.

We know that this feeling of happiness in the children would make Dr. Suzuki very happy also and we really thank Dr. Kataoka for teaching us. We will use this as a springboard from which to grow and continue our research and study together.

If you would like to see more about this event, portions of the printed program are on the SAU web site at <http://www.suzukimusicutah.org> Just click on the words *Suzuki Centennial Celebration* to see the program.

THE MATSUMOTO 10-PIANO CONCERT MAY 2, 1999

Any teachers wishing to observe the concert can contact

Karen Hagberg
8 Prince Street, Rochester, NY 14607
Phone: (716)244-0490
Fax: (716) 244-3542
email: hagberg-drake@juno.com

DR. KATAOKA LECTURES: HOW TO TEACH READING

(These notes were taken by Elaine Worley from Dr. Kataoka's lectures in Salt Lake City, 1993 and Sacramento, 1992 & 1993.)

(Editor's note: Anyone who has had the opportunity to watch Dr. Kataoka teach her own students in Japan knows that her students read music very well, and that they work on reading music at every lesson. What may not be apparent at first is how she teaches reading. Often, her students, when "reading" are not looking at the score at all, but playing a piece they have memorized. Watching her students makes us question what it means to read music. Dr. Kataoka would say that reading a piece of music means being able to play exactly what is written on the page in front of you. In these lectures, she explains her philosophy and method of teaching reading.)

PART ONE: OVERVIEW

My hope is that we will all be good Suzuki Piano Basics teachers. This method begins with listening to a recording, but if we are not careful, we can create students who cannot read music.

Reading is very important. It is most essential for piano performers. If you cannot read a score, this means that you cannot play the piano. We must teach reading when students are young.

Reading is not taught well in most traditional music education. It is assumed that, by reading, we mean knowing where the notes are located on the staff and on the keyboard. This is what is called reading. But I want tell you the real meaning.

When a child is young, this is the time to teach them as many good things as possible.

First, there is the time signature. This is the most important thing in reading. We must look at the time signature, realizing that music may be arranged in 2 beats, 3 beats, 4 beats, etc., and knowing that we have to be able to play the beats correctly.

I believe very strongly that if we merely know what the time signatures mean, this is not useful knowledge. To be precise: you can all recognize note values correctly (such as quarter notes, eighth notes, dotted quarter notes, etc.), but this recognition in itself does not help you when you go to play a piece. HOW to play that particular sixteenth note, what kind of tone you select, THAT is the question. A quarter note is actually four times longer than a sixteenth note. Are you playing it with four times more weight, really thinking of the value in terms of weight (grams)? When you see 4/4 or 3/4, can you actually "breathe" naturally in that rhythm? When you can do these things in performance is the time when you can actually read.

There are many other things that need attention. Composers have many wishes--long after they have died--indicated in the score. A pianist must not only understand every little sign but also be able to actually DO what the composers want us to do.

You must be able to play "down-up" on the rhythm, the same as breathing.

Similarly, you must be able to play *legato* when you see it. There are only two ways to play on a piano: Walking normally (*legato*) and jumping (*staccato*). *Legato* is indicated by a slur or by the word *legato* itself. *Legato* is a most difficult technique. If we walk naturally on the keyboard, *legato* will come out naturally. But doing this on the piano keyboard is complicated. Children do not think about what they are doing, do not want to practice, and are lazy. This makes them practice incorrectly.

When students are in Books 1 & 2, we must teach how to walk naturally on the keys. They do not need lessons actually to walk on the earth because their weight is on their feet and they can do it naturally. They go to piano lessons to get a good education from teachers.

Staccato is easier than *legato* to understand. Playing a *legato* scale is like walking on the keys, and we need to use the "balls" of the fingers (like the soles of the feet). *Staccato* is clearer in the beginning, because it is easier to see what is happening. The skill of reading, the true skill, requires understanding of how to play *legato* or *staccato* on each note.

A pianist must not only understand every little sign, but also be able to actually DO what the composers want us to do.

For example, *Minuet 2* requires a beautiful tone, 100% *legato*, stretching the fingers out to "take" with the ball (fleshy part, or pad) of the finger every time. The body has to know how to handle that.

The principle of how to sing a melody is that the highest note is always singing out. Every time we come to the high point in a phrase, it must be sung out. If the student is unable to shape a phrase, this means that the teacher cannot read correctly (which means cannot demonstrate correctly).

Musical Symbols: Teach students not only to know the meanings of musical terms and symbols, but also what to do with their bodies and fingers in order to execute what is asked. We have to do this from the very beginning of lessons. Every detail must be attended to until the student can do it. The beginning is not so important in the traditional way of thinking. (Dr. Kataoka said that she was educated in a Catholic school as a young child and that, even though she is not a practicing Catholic as an adult, she still recalls all of the prayers she learned in classical Japanese.)

When a child is young, this is the time to teach them as many good things as possible. We must pay attention to *legato*, time signature, use of the body to play beats, etc. This is the best opportunity to learn and maintain the ability to play such things as a very soft accompaniment. *Cradle Song* is such a beautiful piece. Even little children can play it just like the recording. If I ask the question which hand is playing the melody and which hand is playing the accompaniment, everyone knows the answer, even the mothers. The question is, can they do it??

(To be Continued)

This is the first in a series of four articles derived from these lectures.

EDITORIAL

Since Dr. Suzuki's incapacitation and subsequent death, we have witnessed some anticipated power struggles among various factions in the global Suzuki community. We reported two years ago that members of the International Suzuki Association (ISA) were trying to prevent Dr. Kataoka from any longer being able to train teachers and, indeed, to call herself a Suzuki Piano teacher. At that time, Piano Basics Foundation hired an attorney to challenge that mandate, and the ISA immediately backed down from its position.

The latest assault on Dr. Kataoka by the ISA has recently come to our attention. We were informed that Time Warner Publications, the publishers of the Suzuki Method recordings, books and scores in the United States, was instructed by the ISA to change the titles of Dr. Kataoka's books and recordings by removing any reference to Suzuki Method, including the Suzuki Method logo. Again, we instructed our attorney, who by now has accumulated an extensive file of information on the history and development of the Suzuki Method and of Dr. Kataoka's key role in that history, to challenge that decision. Again, the ISA has apparently backed down, since we were just informed by Time Warner that they will not change the names of Dr. Kataoka's publications after all.

In the meantime, we have been told by the SAA that we may not refer to Dr. Kataoka any longer as the co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method in advertising we purchase in their Journal.

We want the members of Piano Basics Foundation to be aware of these events, not to spread gossip or fan the unfortunate flames of conflict in the wake of Dr. Suzuki's wonderful career, but to make you all aware of the importance of our existence as an organization and to thank you all for your very strong support in the form of donations since our inception. Without this support, we would be unable to resist these attacks on Dr. Kataoka as we become aware of them. Thanks to all of you, more students, teachers and parents may continue to benefit from Dr. Kataoka's teaching outside Japan.

It is our position that Suzuki Method has spread far and wide in the past forty years, until it now represents many different styles of teaching. It cannot be "owned" by any one group representing any one style. We maintain that Dr. Kataoka's teaching is as worthy of being called Suzuki Method as any other. As a Foundation, we will continue to defend this position on behalf of all of our members.

Karen Hagberg, President

ON READING MUSIC

BY KAREN HAGBERG

*Reprinted from **Matsumoto News**, Vol. 1, No.2, December 1988. (**Matsumoto News** was written and published from 1988-1991 in Matsumoto.)*

For some time now, I have sensed a general contusion whenever Kataoka-Sensei talks about the subject of teaching reading. What she means by reading music and what most of us in North America understand to be reading music do not appear, at first, to be the same thing at all.

We in North America have, I think, a concept that there are two types of piano playing. The first is where we learn a piece by practicing it for a long time, hopefully ending up with something of performance quality. The second type of playing is with music in front of us--playing a piece we may never have played (or heard) before. We refer to this second type of playing as "sight reading." We assume that the quality of the practiced music will be higher, but we value the ability to play at sight--to sit down and just enjoy various pieces of music, perhaps while playing with others in ensemble.

Kataoka-Sensei, on the other hand, seems to define reading as the ability to faithfully reproduce what is written on a page of music. To play in good rhythm with strong downbeats and lighter upbeats; to play longer notes with more weight than shorter ones; to hold notes for their full value; to play legato perfectly, with a smooth, singing line and no overlapping; to follow the dynamics, fingerings and phrasings faithfully. When students fail to do one or more of these things in a piece long since memorized, Kataoka-Sensei often tells them that they cannot read music.

In this latter case, we are inclined to say that the person cannot *play*, despite the fact that he or she may have been able to read what was printed on the page. catafalques, on the other hand, insists that reading results in *sound*, and that being unable to execute a given musical symbol means, in essence, that you cannot read it, since reading without the ability to execute what you've read is virtually worthless (except maybe for passing a theory test).

Without technique, a person cannot produce whatever he or she has seen in music at all.

Is there a point where these two concepts meet? I believe there is.

First of all, when we distinguish *sight reading* from *long-term practicing and perfecting*, we do not really mean to imply that one can learn a piece well *without* reading it (that is, unless you are a small child and have a

teacher and a parent showing you every step along the way). And we must agree that being able to reproduce the various musical directions on a page of music is of prime importance; and, in that sense, that good reading is dependent on good technique. Without technique, a person cannot produce whatever he or she has seen in the music at all.

For example, we have all been taught intellectually that 2/4 time consists of a strong downbeat followed by an upbeat, the preparation for the next down beat. But if we have not learned to play so as to make downbeats and upbeats sound completely different from one another (like inhales and exhales, as Kataoka-Sensei says) our playing will sound heavy and tedious and without a sense of good rhythm, a sense of life, of nature. While playing, we ourselves may feel a sense of the rhythm internally, but if it's not *heard* in our performance, this sense is worthless. Whenever I tape a performance, I hear the difference between my felt sense of the rhythm and how much rhythm I am actually able (or unable!) to put into my sound. Kataoka-Sensei has said that when tape recorders first became popular and she heard herself play on tape, she thought the machine was broken! Most of us were not trained to hear how we really sound while we are playing.

Playing loud and soft is also a physical technique. Of course, we know the difference between *piano* and *forte*, but do we have the technique to play loud and soft, or do we just like to think we're making this distinction in the music because we've read what the music tells us we're supposed to do? In my tapes I hear that I still have difficulty playing loud and soft.

All musical symbols, including note values, phrasings, fingerings, articulations, tempo indications and time signatures can be perceived intellectually or they can be read and actually executed--transformed into the sound the composer asks for. But without technique, this transformation can never take place.

So technique is the basic which must be taught before effective reading can happen. Then, symbols on the page must be coordinated with the techniques already learned. Once this begins to happen, the ability to "sight read" develops naturally.

Kataoka-Sensei's students can all read music extremely well. People wonder how she teaches reading. The answer is that she teaches technique first, so that, from the very beginning, reading music results in playing very faithfully what is read.

In Kataoka-Sensei's studio, students are never asked to "sight-read" *per se*. When they begin Book 2, they prepare a "reading piece" each week (more than one if they can). They begin in the *Methode Rose* and continue through Czemy's *First Instruction in Piano Playing: 100 Recreations* and his *Op. 599, 718, 748, 849, 299, and 740*, followed by the Bach *2-Part Inventions*. In the lesson, the music is open in front of the student, but the student has usually memorized all or most of it. The student is prepared to play the piece through, following all the directions on the page. All students are taught that not to follow even one of these directions is a serious mistake. Kataoka-Sensei refers to the printed page when calling attention to these mistakes. Then she demonstrates how the passage *should* be played, and shows the student how to execute it properly, never stopping until the student *can* do it. After correct practice, the same piece is played well the following week.

Of course, there are an infinite number of levels of technical expertise in any area. Playing loud and soft, for example, is a technique which can always be improved upon. As the reading pieces become more and more difficult, all musical concepts are refined again and again. Usually, Kataoka-Sensei limits her refining to one concept per piece--maybe two. But the actual teaching does not become more complicated or even more subtle. She simply stresses the basics she began teaching in the *Methode Rose*: a good sense of rhythm; close attention to note values and the relative weight each note value gets; dynamics; phrasing; articulations; and fingerings. In this way, reading and technique become interdependent. The succession of reading pieces Kataoka-Sensei uses is designed, in turn, to build technique. The only technical exercises she uses in addition to these pieces are scales. Arpeggios, octaves, ornaments, fast passage work and all other basic techniques are learned in the reading pieces themselves.

Students are trained to learn at least one of these pieces a week. As the pieces become very difficult, it becomes obvious that the students have become very proficient at reading and perfecting a new piece quickly. This

training produces excellent sight readers. It would be just impossible to perfect pieces like this in a week if the initial reading were not already excellent by "sight-reading" standards.

A solid technique allows a student to read easily and naturally, and to turn what is written on the page into the sound the composer intended. It is hard to imagine how else reading could be taught effectively.

**THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL PIANO BASICS
10-PIANO CONCERT
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
AUGUST 6, 1999**

All teachers, new to Piano Basics or experienced, are invited to attend the two-week rehearsal period and concert. Teachers with participating students should send name of students and proposed piece to

Linda Nakagawa
242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, CA 95831
Phone/Fax: (916) 422-2952
email: lgnak@quiknet.com

FINAL DEADLINE: DECEMBER 10, 1998

ODE TO MY GRAND PIANO

by Laura Binford, age 10

*Oh, grand piano, you feel so smooth when I move my
fingers on your keys.*

You were born in Japan, but I bought you used.

You are like a brand new black velvet dress with white buttons.

*When the sun shines on your long, black body, you
glitter and shine like the sun reflecting on the water.*

When I touch you, you make me feel like I could play forever until I die.

In my dreams, Beethoven and I play a duet on you.

When I close you up I fret, because you're all alone and caged up.

Oh piano, you are so grand.

Laura, a student of Bruce Boiney, wrote this poem as a school assignment. Whereas her classmates wrote their odes to their sneakers, their Nintendo 64's, or even their own hair; Laura wrote hers to her grand piano.

Happy Holidays from Piano Basics Foundation

Please send corrections to [Kenneth Wilburn](#), web editor for **Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News**.

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